

USIS in Action

How Democracy Is Nudged Ahead in Ecuador

GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR.

Fred Shaffer, chief of the United States Information Service office in Guayaquil, looked up from his desk as the visitor entered. "Did you see that little man who just left?" he asked with a smile. "Didn't seem very happy, did he?"

The visitor recalled the man, a small Ecuadorian with a large satchel. He had come out of the office, looking slightly sick, and nearly bowled over the receptionist as he fled through the door to the street.

"I think that man has troubles," Mr. Shaffer explained. "He owns a radio station that used to broadcast so much anti-American stuff that we nicknamed it the Voice of Moscow." He shook his head sadly. "Then he had some bad luck; suddenly all his advertisers quit him and now he's nearly bankrupt." He smiled faintly. "And he has the gall to come in here and try to blame it on me—can you imagine such a thing?"

The visitor detected a note of irony.

A Crisis over Delegates

It was a hot afternoon in Guayaquil, where the year-round temperature averages 77 degrees, but in the USIS office no one had time to mop his brow. The scene was one of apparent chaos: Visitors were constantly arriving; the phone rang incessantly; and crises succeeded themselves in an apparently interminable progression.

Jim Smith, the press officer, entered the room and introduced another crisis. "Those women are outside, Fred," he said. "Did we get word on the other delegates?"

Mr. Shaffer picked up the phone and dialed a number. "Guillermo? We're waiting on your people—they coming over?" There was a pause, and a horrified expression crossed his face. "Great balls of fire!" he exclaimed. "I don't want you to think I'm pressing you on this thing, Guillermo, but we've set up this meeting four times now—can you give me some idea when you'll get around to appointing your delegates?"

He hung up the phone and fell back in his chair. Mr. Smith groaned and shook his head. "I can't face those women again," he said helplessly. "You'll have to do it, Fred—it's your turn."

Mike Elsenstadt, the cultural affairs officer, appeared in the door. "What about the elections?" he asked. "I heard we won." Mr. Smith beamed. "Right. Eighteen hundred to eleven hundred—how's that for an upset?"

Mr. Elsenstadt gave a mock salute and turned to go. "Tell me later on. I have 40 kids in my office, waiting to see the movie."

The Insistent Telephone

The phone rang; a sack of powdered milk, donated by an American welfare agency, had been found in the black market and the story was in the afternoon paper. The phone rang again; the USIS office in Quito was demanding photos of 15 dump trucks that had arrived that morning from the United States. While Mr. Shaffer checked on the milk, Mr. Smith went to see what had happened to the photos.

He returned with a long face; the film had not been developed because the photo lab man had taken a religious holiday. The receptionist reported that a local journalist, a friend of Mr. Shaffer, was demanding to know why he'd been refused a visa to go to the States. And the women were getting impatient.

Out in the hot sun, the cabs rolled back and forth like animals looking for meat, honking their horns incessantly at every walking prospect. Several American tourists were sitting at a sidewalk cafe talking excitedly about a Communist demonstration the night before. It had been broken up by a cavalry charge through the Plaza Centenario, the city's principal park.

At the Phoenix Club, where Anglo-Americans gather in the evenings to reaffirm their solidarity over beer and bridge, an unemployed helicopter pilot was idly tossing darts at a much-punctured board, killing time until somebody arrived to keep him company. For Guayaquil it was a day like any other day, with a lot to talk about and not much to do.

Where the Unexpected Is Predictable

Even at USIS, despite the apparent chaos, it was a pretty routine day. Nothing had happened that could not have been predicted—and at the same time everything had been unexpected.

The USIS is the overseas arm of the United States Information Agency, headquartered in Washington and headed by Edward R. Murrow. Each year, when Congress is asked to appropriate new funds for USIS, legislators want to know: "Why do they need all that money? What do they do with it?"

The agency's reply could easily be



Hunter S. Thompson

Jim Smith, United States Information Service press officer, stops to chat with some Ecuadorian children in the Barrios Suburbanos.

lifted from one of its own pamphlets: "The young officers, now being recruited, will carry out a mission long ago established—to submit evidence to people of other nations that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace. They must also be able to counter hostile propaganda."

Doing things like "countering hostile propaganda" costs money—especially when the propaganda is put out by such practiced craftsmen as the editors of Prensa Latina (Fidel Castro's news service) and the New China News Agency, both operative in Ecuador. And money is a commodity USIS officials would like in greater abundance.

When Mr. Shaffer was program manager of a radio and TV station in York, Pa., he points out, the station had an annual budget of slightly over \$300,000. The 1962 USIS budget for all of Ecuador, by comparison, is \$151,160. And for all of Latin America—20 countries—it's approximately \$4,000,000, with almost one-fifth for Brazil.

The Voice of America

These figures are slightly misleading, however, because the USIS operation in South America is given a considerable boost by additional money spent in Washington. A good example is the Voice of America—which comes in very clearly, all over the continent, seven days a week. The "Voice" transmits regular broadcasts from Washington, and also provides taped programs used by 235 local stations in 15 Latin American countries.

Another world-wide service is the USIA press wire, which sends out a steady stream of news stories for local papers. These stories are not so much slanted as selected. A recent day's fare, for example, included coverage of Ecuadorian President Arosemena in New York; a wrap-up of the previous night's Teletar activity; a report on the disarmament committee meeting in Geneva; and Senate comments on Puerto Rico's anniversary.

There's locally originated USIS material, too—and newspapers welcome it. "Our function is propaganda," says Frank Dean, press officer in Quito, "but we don't like to use that term because of its unfortunate connotation."

Whatever the material is called, however, USIS places a lot of it. The Guayaquil branch, distributing to three local papers and 18 in the coastal provinces, placed 12,540 inches during June alone. Mr. Dean's office in Quito, serving three papers in the capital and 31 in the mountain provinces, racked up another 13,000 inches.

What kind of "propaganda"? In Guayaquil, the June breakdown included 1,396 inches of science news (space achievements, medicine, and so on); 464 on United States foreign policy; 2,670 on "inter-American subjects" (Organization of American States activity, news from other countries); 404 on sports, and 1,934 on "Cultural, Educational, and Agricultural subjects," a catch-all category covering everything from Pablo Casals to trenchmouth in the Argentine.

Local Subjects Given Big Play

There's outright anti-Communist material, too, of course—2,103 inches of it, including photo stories on the Berlin wall,

food rationing in Cuba, famine in China, and so forth. And the month's biggest news category is local subjects (3,317 inches), which means stories from Guayaquil and the nearby provinces. Most of these center on the Alliance for Progress, what it means for Ecuador, and specific ways it's being put into effect.

A tremendous amount of USIS effort goes into what the handbook calls "personal contact." This is a gray, uncertain area where imagination, quick wits, and a good sense of humor can tip the balance between triumph and disaster. If the businessmen of Guayaquil didn't respect Mr. Shaffer, for instance, he couldn't have reduced the "Voice of Moscow" to financial ruin in a few short weeks—which he did.

The station was a steady outlet for Prensa Latina material. Its viewpoint was patently anti-American, yet most of its advertising revenue was coming from representatives of American-owned firms whose interests do not lie in exactly the same area as those of Prensa Latina.

Sponsors Quickly Withdraw

So Mr. Shaffer became a regular listener—with a tape recorder. "In five days," he says, "I picked up one open denunciation of our Point Four program; one of Irv Rubenstein, the Point Four labor representative; one of the Peace Corps; one of the Alliance for Progress; and one of the Empresa Elctrica, a US-owned light and power company—all preceded and followed by advertisements for American products."

He then notified the companies involved, asking if they were aware of what their advertising dollars were sponsoring. They were not, but they quickly withdrew their commercials.

Another example of improvised USIS work was a recent election for the presidency of the Guayaquil chapter of FEUE, the national association of university students. Mr. Smith, who does a lot of work with various student groups, was convinced that Luis Bonini, a rabid Leftist, was going to win—not because he had a majority, but because the pro-democratic students were split into seven or eight factions.

Although USIS maintained a strictly hands-off stance, Mr. Smith worked hard in private conversations to convince the anti-Bonini students that their only hope was in unity. And Marcello Santos, a staunch pro-American, upset Bonini by a vote of 1,800 to 1,100.

Still a third aspect of this personal contact is a USIS-sponsored Community Center taking shape in Guayaquil's barrios suburbanos, one of the worst slums in the Western Hemisphere. The community center idea, one of the biggest factors in the USIS program, is basically a self-help concept: The people of some community—usually a lower-class one—get together and undertake projects to lift themselves up by the bootstraps. Usually this involves building houses or schools.

For some time, Guayaquil has had a makeshift center functioning in several rooms of a barrios municipal school. Now land has been donated for a new building, and roughly \$12,000 has been pledged to build the structure. Some of this money will come from USIS; most, plus the land donation, comes from local American and Ecuadorian businessmen. Last month, a Peace Corps contingent arrived to help build the Center and get it under way.

During the day of apparent chaos at USIS described earlier, Mr. Smith was trying for the fourth time to set up a meeting of the Center's board of directors. Three earlier attempts had failed, because the businessmen's representatives had not appeared. Now the fourth meeting would also be called off. The only people on hand were the three women from the barrios suburbanos, and somebody had to tell them it was another false alarm.

Getting people to honor appointments is only one of the USIS' frustrations in Guayaquil. Another, probably the biggest, is trying to convince them they can solve their own problems. Progress is slow, and all of it comes in spite of daily Communist harassment. The people themselves are often exasperating; there is never enough money; and sometimes a tiny detail will stall an entire program.

Anyone in Guayaquil for any length of time, though, is encouraged by what he sees. It is on this sort of level—in the barrios and the daily papers and local student elections—that the battle to make democracy a reality in South America will be won or lost.

—HUNTER S. THOMPSON



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A student fills out a card in the library of one of the USIS sponsored cultural centers in Ecuador called "bi-national centers."